Books Build Background

A list of books to read with purpose and pleasure

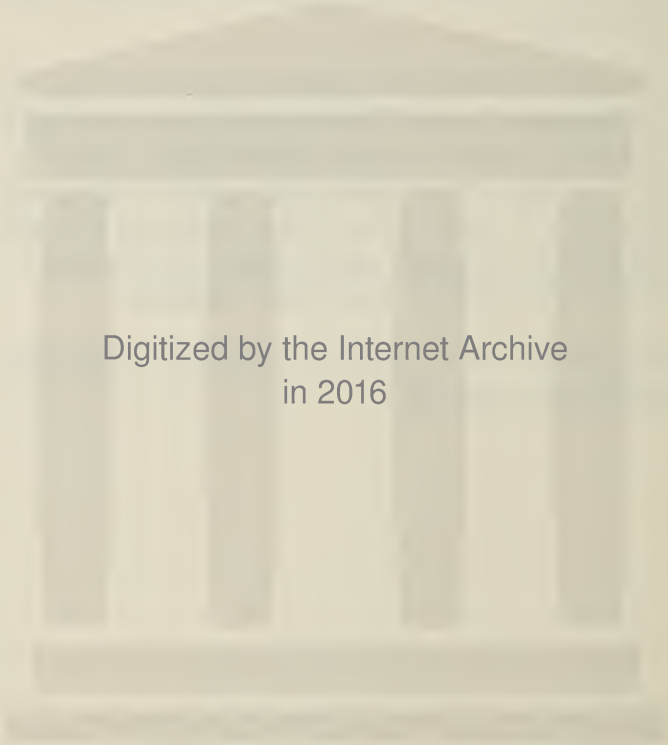


Great books are universal books. They stand the test of time. Their themes apply not to one place nor one situation but deal with the human condition in all places and in all ages.

Here is a list of more than 100 such works—books about human emotions and struggles, depicting grief and despair, love and joy, adventure and aspiration.

The list is arranged alphabetically by title. In most cases only one title by each author has been included because of space limitations. However, most of the writers have other books which you may wish to read. Most of the works on this list are fiction, although some drama and poetry—and the Holy Bible—have been included.

Use this list as a guide to enriching, enjoyable reading experiences.



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THE ACTS OF KING ARTHUR AND HIS NOBLE KNIGHTS **John Steinbeck**

After a lifetime enchantment with the stories of Merlin, Mordred, Lancelot, and Arthur, Steinbeck recreates here the Arthurian legend with all its wonder and magic.

AESOP'S FABLES **Aesop**

Over two thousand years ago a Greek slave found wise and humorous lessons for man in parables of talking animals.

ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND **Charles L. Dodgson**

Down the rabbit hole falls Alice, embarking on a fantastic adventure in which she meets the Mad Hatter, the Duchess, and the Cheshire Cat.

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT **Erich M. Remarque**

To youthful German soldiers comes brutal proof that war is not glory.

ALL THE KING'S MEN **Robert Penn Warren**

Rising from humble origins, Willie Stark becomes a governor who abuses his power.

AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY **Theodore Dreiser**

Marriage to Sondra would have meant the realization of all Clyde Griffiths' dreams of power and money, but Roberta stood in his way.

ANIMAL FARM **George Orwell**

In this political satire the barnyard animals wrest control of the farm from their master.

ANNA KARENINA **Leo N. Tolstoi**

Anna's ill-fated love begins with her introduction to dashing Count Vronsky and ends in the roar of an oncoming train.

THE ARABIAN NIGHTS

Night after night Scheherazade, sentenced to die by her husband the sultan, spins tales of thieves and caliphs, princes and merchants, Aladdin and Sinbad, to forestall her execution.

ARROWSMITH **Sinclair Lewis**

His wife told Dr. Arrowsmith, "You belong in a laboratory finding out things, not advertising them." And she was right.

AS I LAY DYING **William Faulkner**

The Bundren family takes the ripening corpse of Addie, wife and mother, on a gruesomely comic journey that is interrupted by the elemental forces of fire and flood.

ATLAS SHRUGGED **Ayn Rand**

Who is John Galt? Is he the ideal man, working to create a productive, rational industrial society, or is he a selfish egotist, bent on destroying the common good?

THE BOUNTY TRILOGY **Charles B. Nordhoff**

The crew of *H. M. S. Bounty* turn against Captain Bligh and escape to the South Sea islands, some to die at the hands of natives, some to wallow in drunken stupor, some to find peace.

BRAVE NEW WORLD **Aldous Huxley**

In a world where there is no pain, hunger, suffering — or freedom — one test-tube baby grows up with revolutionary thoughts about liberty and individuality.

BREAD AND WINE **Ignazio Silone**

Pietro Spina believed that one man could make a difference, so he returned to his native Italy to organize the underground movement against fascism.

BUDDENBROOKS **Thomas Mann**

In four generations the Buddenbrooks, a 19-century German mercantile family, decline from wealth and honor to mean-spirited poverty.

THE CAINE MUTINY **Herman Wouk**

A broken-down cruiser, the *Caine*, a captain who ran from fire, a crew exhausted, and a war raging—these were more than enough to make Willie Keith grow up.

THE CANTERBURY TALES **Geoffrey Chaucer**

Gentle and aristocratic, coarse and vulgar, sometimes not even sober, Chaucer's pilgrims reveal much about themselves as they tell their tales along the way to Canterbury.

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE **J. D. Salinger**

The innocent, decent, eternal teenager Holden Caulfield drops out before he is kicked out of prep school and spends three days and nights wandering the streets of New York.

CATCH-22 **Joseph Heller**

You can get out of the Army if you're crazy; but if you *want* to get out, you must be sane. So the Army informs bombardier Yossarian, a dangerously sane man.

CHILDHOOD'S END **Arthur C. Clarke**

For over a century the unhuman Overlords rule Earth, preparing its people for their true cosmic destiny.

COLLECTED WORKS **William Shakespeare**

Love and joy, tragedy and death, hope and disappointment—all the human emotions are portrayed in the drama of this great playwright.

THE COMPLETE SHERLOCK HOLMES
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Murder, kidnapping, robbery, extortion are all elementary for master detective Sherlock Holmes and his able assistant Dr. Watson.

THE COUNT OF MONTE CRISTO
Alexander Dumas

Unjustly accused of being an agent for Napoleon, Edmond Dantes is imprisoned in the Chateau d'If where a fellow prisoner tells him of a hidden treasure and the means to avenge his enemies.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT **Fedor Dostoevskii**

Driven by poverty, a Russian student tries to justify his murder of a money-lending hag and faces an aftermath of unexpected torment.

CRY, THE BELOVED COUNTRY **Alan Paton**

Searching for his son amid the sin and misery of Johannesburg, a Zulu clergyman finds a murderer.

CYRANO DE BERGERAC **Edmund Rostand**

Swordsman and poet, soldier and romantic, Cryano fears that his grotesque nose will hinder his courtship of Roxane.

DARKNESS AT NOON **Arthur Koestler**

An old Bolshevik is imprisoned, tortured, and executed at the hands of a dictatorship he helped to create.

DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP
Willa S. Cather

Two priests dedicate their lives to missions in the American Southwest, a land of harsh deserts, adobe huts, and ancient Indian customs.

A DEATH IN THE FAMILY **James Agee**

At the age of six a shy and sensitive boy must come to terms with the senseless death of his beloved father.

DEATH OF A SALESMAN **Arthur Miller**

"I'm tired to the death . . . I just couldn't make it, Linda." At 60, Willy Loman faces the emptiness and failure of his lifelong pursuit of the American Dream.

THE DEERSLAYER **James F. Cooper**

With the aid of Chingachgook and Hurry Harry, a resourceful and heroic woodsman named Deerslayer seeks the Indian girl Hist, who is held prisoner by the Hurons.

DOCTOR FAUSTUS **Christopher Marlowe**

Mephistophilis, the devil, makes a pact with the scholarly Dr. Faustus: knowledge and power in return for the damnation of his immortal soul.

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE
Robert Louis Stevenson

When a highly respected physician wills his estate to an evil, misshapen criminal, his lawyer suspects blackmail; but the truth is far more shocking.

DOCTOR ZHIVAGO **Boris Pasternak**

In a sweeping story of passion and revolution, physician Yurii Zhivago struggles to maintain his spiritual independence while the upheavals of the Russian Revolution reach into every corner of his life.

A DOLL'S HOUSE **Henrik Ibsen**
Helmer sees his "doll-wife" Nora as a pretty plaything and underestimates her until it is far too late.

DON QUIXOTE **Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra**
Astride an old nag, a Spanish country gentleman imagines himself a knight en route to heroic adventures—three hundred years too late.

DUNE **Frank Herbert**
Paul Atreides' dual heritage as a Bene Gesserit and as ruler of the desert planet Arrakis culminates in the establishment of a new power in the Empire.

ETHAN FROME **Edith N. Wharton**
In a desolate New England farmhouse three people live out their lives, bound together in a strange, unspeakable destiny.

A FAREWELL TO ARMS **Ernest Hemingway**
It was an ugly, dirty, horrible war for the American ambulance driver. Then, in a casual encounter, he met Catherine.

THE FOUNDATION TRILOGY **Isaac Asimov**
Predicting the fall of the Galactic Empire, the psychohistorians set into motion a 1000-year plan to preserve mankind.

FRANKENSTEIN **Mary W. Shelley**
"I started from my sleep with horror . . . I beheld the wretch . . . the miserable monster whom I had created."

THE GLASS MENAGERIE **Tennessee Williams**
Crippled and painfully shy, Laura escapes from her mother's ambitions and fantasies and takes refuge in her collection of glass animals.

GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN
James Baldwin

Five members of a Harlem fundamentalist church struggle with their love, fear, and their anger toward God and each other.

GONE WITH THE WIND **Margaret Mitchell**

While the Civil War ravages Georgia's towns and plantations, willful Scarlett O'Hara and unscrupulous Rhett Butler clash in a tumultuous battle of wits.

THE GOOD EARTH **Pearl S. Buck**

"The story is one of nature, with its times of famine and plenty, floods and drouth, and of a Chinese peasant who loved the land above anything else."

THE GRAPES OF WRATH **John Steinbeck**

All the ugly realities of the Depression, from poverty to moral debasement, plague the Joad family in its journey from Okie country to the promised land of California.

THE GREAT GATSBY **F. Scott Fitzgerald**

Amid the whirl and abandon of the roaring twenties a romantic bootlegger buys a mansion near the sweetheart of his youth and tries to rekindle their old love.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS **Jonathan Swift**

In Gulliver's voyages to Lilliput, Brobdingnag, and the land of the Houyhnhnms, Swift combines the delight of adventure with the bite of satire.

LES MISERABLES **Victor M. Hugo**
The theft of a loaf of bread sends Jean Valjean, inextricably bound to police inspector Javert, down a path of prison, disguise, and a lifelong search for redemption.

THE LITTLE PRINCE **Antoine de Saint Exupery**
In the lonely, burning sands of the Sahara a strange meeting takes place between a pilot forced down by engine trouble and a prince from another planet.

LOOK HOMEWARD ANGEL **Thomas Wolfe**
For Eugene, always the "different one" of family and school, education promises escape from home and all that his home means: drink, avarice, needless death.

LORD JIM **Joseph Conrad**
Disgraced at sea when he deserts his sinking ship, Jim sets forth on a search for self respect, a mission which takes him finally to a remote Malayan village.

LORD OF THE FLIES **William G. Golding**
As an atomic holocaust rages, a small group of English schoolboys, stranded on a coral island, attempts to fashion its own civilization; but they soon discover an enemy more terrifying than war.

THE LORD OF THE RINGS **J. R. R. Tolkien**
Frodo, a young hobbit, travels in and out of Middle Earth to prevent evil hands from acquiring the magic ring and its power.

LOST HORIZON **James Hilton**
Somewhere in Tibet, in the serene lamasery of Shangri-La, Conway is offered never-ending youth.

MADAME BOVARY **Gustave Flaubert**

Unhappy in her marriage to a kind but dull country doctor, Emma Bovary seeks to fulfill her romantic dreams—with tragic results.

MAN'S FATE **Andre Malraux**

After overthrowing China's warlord regime in 1927, several individuals—communist insurgents, bourgeois members of Chiang Kai-shek's army, and foreign capitalists—clash in a struggle for power.

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES **Ray Bradbury**

With the same covetousness and jealousy which brought disaster to Earth, the first human colonizers destroy the civilization of Mars.

THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING **Carson McCullers**

Frankie is not a member, neither of her friends' club nor of her brother's wedding, as she struggles to deal with her childhood longings and loneliness.

METAMORPHOSIS **Franz Kafka**

In this allegory about the many forms of exile a young man wakes up to find that, although his nature remains the same, he has turned into an enormous cockroach.

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS **George Eliot**

In an English country village on the banks of the River Floss, brave and spirited Maggie struggles with conflicting loyalties in her family and in her life.

MOBY DICK **Herman Melville**

Vengeful Captain Ahab turns the full force of his hate against the great white whale Moby Dick.

THE PROPHET **Kahlil Gibran**

With timeless wisdom the prophet speaks of love and marriage, of work and joy, of freedom and sorrow.

A RAISIN IN THE SUN **Lorraine Hansberry**

To this black family a sudden inheritance brings each member's dreams within reach—but the dreams soon crumble.

THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

Stephen Crane

Fresh from the peace of the country, young Henry Fleming tests his courage in the bloody conflict of the Civil War.

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE **Thomas Hardy**

Clym Yeobright returns home from Paris with hopes of beginning a useful life only to be faced with tragedy and loss.

ROBINSON CRUSOE **Daniel Defoe**

Marooned on a desert island, a man struggles to survive without seeing another friendly human for twenty years—and then he notices the footprints in the sand.

SEVEN SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS

Herbert G. Wells

Wells' fantasies of the future, his invention of Time Traveller and Time Machine, his war of Martians against Earth offer enthralling precursors to present-day space adventure.

SHORT FICTION OF THE MASTERS

Leo Hamalian & Frederick R. Karl, eds.

Masters of the craft include Alberto Moravia, Maxim Gorki, Sholom Aleichem, D. H. Lawrence.

SIDDHARTHA **Hermann Hesse**

A young Indian renounces the life his father has planned for him and sets forth on a pilgrimage to try out ways of living and ways of thinking.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE **Kurt Vonnegut**

He fought in World War II and survived the fire bombing of Dresden, he became an optometrist and a pillar of his community and, on the night of his daughter's wedding, Billy Pilgrim became unstuck in time.

SONS AND LOVERS **D. H. Lawrence**

Sensitive, intelligent Paul Morel, born to a coarse mining family, sets out to make more of his life through art.

THE SOUND OF WAVES **Yukio Mishima**

The young fisherman Shinji falls in love with Hatsue, but her wealthy father considers it an unworthy match.

THE STRANGER **Albert Camus**

Under the blazing Algerian sun Merseault contemplates the death of his mother and the absurdity of man's life and aspirations.

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND
Robert A. Heinlein

Viewing Earth's peculiar institutions with Martian philosophy, Valentine Michael Smith, born and raised on Mars, learns to *grok* the human condition.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES **Charles Dickens**

Facing death during the violent upheaval of the French Revolution, two men in love with the same woman must decide who will be the survivor.

TALES OF MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION **Edgar A. Poe**

Macabre, chilling ventures beyond the shadows, beyond the tomb.

THINGS FALL APART **Chinua Achebe**

Living in a remote Nigerian village, Okonkwo longs only for a continuation of the old order; but time brings inevitable changes.

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD **Harper Lee**

Jem and Scout Finch watch their small southern town grow tense when their father, a lawyer, decides to defend a black man accused of rape.

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE **Virginia Woolf**

A family, a house, time, and a trip.

A TREASURY OF GREAT POEMS, ENGLISH AND AMERICAN, FROM THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE ENGLISH SPIRIT TO THE OUTSTANDING POETRY OF OUR TIME **Louis Untermeyer, ed.**

From Sir Walter Raleigh and William Blake to Archibald MacLeish and e. e. cummings, most of the great English and American poets are included in this collection.

A TREASURY OF THE THEATRE **John Gassner**

From ancient tragedies to modern classics: Sophocles, Moliere, Wilde, Lorce, Miller, Sartre are just a few of the playwrights included.

THE TURN OF THE SCREW **Henry James**

The arrival of a governess to care for two charming children sets in motion a tale of horror.

U.S.A. (THE 42ND PARALLEL, NINETEEN-NINETEEN, THE BIG MONEY) **John Dos Passos**
This epic trilogy explores American society as it follows a large cast of characters from the dawn of the 20th century to the beginning of the Great Depression.

VANITY FAIR **William M. Thackeray**
With single-minded calculation, Becky Sharp makes her way to the pinnacles of English society and to marriage with Rawdon Crawley.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS **Emily J. Bronte**
The rugged windswept moors in the north of England set the scene for Heathcliff's tormented love of Catherine.

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